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SOUTHERN FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION

New Orleans, La.

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Occurrence of Fire in the Hardwoods

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Reserve

It has been commonly thought that fires in the Louisiana hardwood region were a factor that scarcely warranted serious consideration since the moist nature of the site would prevent fires from starting or spreading.

A study that has been carried on during the past three months by the Louisiana Division of Forestry and the Southern Forest Experiment Station in ten parishes in the northeast part of the State has brought out the following facts:

During the fall of 1924 and the spring of 1925 forest fires occurred in some portion of each of the ten northern parishes in the hardwood region, and 12 out of 22 hardwood companies in this region from which reports were available claim that their lands were burned over in part at that time (only two were certain that they had had no fires). The 1924-1925 period was a particularly dry one and fires were common throughout the entire state. Both virgin and cut-over hardwood lands were burned as well as pine lands. But this was only one of the years during which hardwood timber has been injured by fire. Old fire scars on virgin timber now being cut show that former serious fires had occurred in 1915, in 1894 or 1895, in 1883 and at earlier dates at about 10 to 15 year intervals. It was found that following each of these fires, the annual diameter growth of the trees had slowed down for a period of from at least three to five years in cases where the trees were not so seriously injured as to be killed outright. Trees that were injured in one fire were often entirely killed by subsequent fires. Out of 46 recently cut gum, oak, and elm trees examined, distinct fire damage from the 1924 fire was noted on 28. These trees were taken at random and represent average conditions. Many of the trees injured in the 1924 fire now show considerable decay in the butt log and in some cases the defect is so great that from four to six feet has to be culled from the butt and left in the woods. Aside from the injury to the mature timber, many seedlings and saplings have also been killed.

In spite of the seriousness of this damage to their standing timber, and most of the operators admit that some damage is done, only one or two companies have taken any definite steps to prevent or suppress fires in their hardwood holdings. The fires in the hardwoods are not intentionally set but for the most part are the result of carelessness.

G. H. Lentz

